

**From:** [Deibert, Pat](#)  
**To:** [Edmunds, Daly](#)  
**Cc:** [Alex Schubert](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Request for USFWS Comments - Lander RMP  
**Date:** Thursday, March 21, 2013 11:15:35 AM  
**Attachments:** [clarification memo.pdf](#)  
[WY12CPA0134.pdf](#)

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Hey Daly -

This is what I have, but Alex Schubert is the contact on this. I hear you are moving! just a little stress..... :)

p

On Wed, Mar 20, 2013 at 2:10 PM, Edmunds, Daly <[dedmunds@audubon.org](mailto:dedmunds@audubon.org)> wrote:

Hello Pat,

Hope you had a nice St. Patty's day!!!

I was wondering if you could please share all of the comments USFWS has submitted to BLM Lander RMP.

Much appreciated!!

- Daly

**Daly Edmunds**

Regional Policy Coordinator

WY & CO Policy Office

Laramie, Wyoming

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Cheyenne, WY 82009  
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got leks?



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services  
5353 Yellowstone Road, Suite 308A  
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82009



In Reply Refer To:  
06E13000/WY12CPA0134, WY12CPA0143, and WY12CPA0151

OCT 25 2012

### Memorandum

To: State Director, Bureau of Land Management, State Office, Cheyenne, Wyoming

From: Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wyoming Field Office,  
Cheyenne, Wyoming

Subject: Clarification of Service Comments on the Lander, Bighorn Basin, and Buffalo Resource Management Plan Revision Conformance Review for the Greater sage-grouse National Technical Team Report

This memorandum is intended to provide clarification of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) recent memorandums regarding the Lander, Bighorn Basin, and Buffalo Resource Management Plan (RMP) Revision Conformance Review for the Greater sage-grouse (sage-grouse) National Technical Team (NTT) Report. During June and July 2012, the Service received a request from the Lander, Worland (Bighorn Basin), and Buffalo field offices to provide formal written comments to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) regarding the BLM's conformance to the NTT report. Within our response memorandums (referenced WY12CPA0134, WY12CPA0143, and WY12CPA0151, respectively), the Service, as requested, listed a number of examples where the proposed plans for the Lander, Bighorn Basin, and Buffalo RMP Revisions were not consistent with the direction of the NTT report. Because the Service favors the most extensive conservation measures possible to protect the Greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), the Service expressed preference for the "Conservation Alternative" present in these proposed plans. The Service realizes, however, that the BLM must balance conservation for sage-grouse with their multiple-use objectives for land management. The Service also realizes that, to date, the BLM has undertaken extensive proactive planning efforts to provide protective measures for sage-grouse in all of the RMPs in Wyoming statewide. Specifically, the BLM has been working towards implementing the Wyoming Core Area Strategy as developed by numerous partners across Wyoming with the intention of conserving sage-grouse.

Although the Service continues to prefer the conservation alternative for these RMPs, as it offers the most extensive conservation possible, the Service is pleased with the attempts of the BLM to

adopt the Wyoming Core Area Strategy and incorporate it into their RMPs statewide. The Service believes the Wyoming Core Area Strategy can result in the long-term conservation of the sage-grouse in this state; thus, contribute to reducing the need to list the species range-wide under the Endangered Species Act. As you are well aware, actions outside of BLM-administered land in the range of sage-grouse may influence any final listing decision. However, implementation of the Wyoming Core Area Strategy will represent a significant effort that the BLM in Wyoming can implement to conserve the sage-grouse.

The Service appreciates the BLM sharing the *Wyoming Sage-Grouse Management Comparison and Explanation for Wyoming BLM Proposed Plan Related to Recommendations from the National Technical Team (NTT) Report Table*. The table provides clarification and rationale for deviations from the NTT that the Service had commented on in the proposed plan, and it also correspondingly reflects that the BLM remains in line with the Wyoming Core Area Strategy.

We believe the Wyoming Core Area Strategy, along with the guidelines outlined by the Implementation Team and the Inter-agency Implementation working subgroup, is a sound policy framework by which to conserve sage-grouse in Wyoming. As stated in our March 23, 2010, status determination for the sage-grouse (Decision; 75 FR 13910), "the Service believes that the core area strategy ... if implemented by all landowners via regulatory mechanisms, would provide adequate protection for sage-grouse and their habitat in that State." This is a critical point and remains true for the Wyoming Core Area Strategy. To be effective, State, Federal and private landowners must all implement the Wyoming Core Area Strategy.

Implementation of the Wyoming Core Area Strategy will need to keep current with the best available science in order to meet the information requirements of the Act (section 4(b)(1)(A)). This may include incorporation of other important seasonal habitats into core areas as they are identified. While we support the development of local solutions to address the protection of seasonal habitats as they are identified, these local solutions must be based on sound scientific data. It is also critical that the protections for seasonal habitats address the real conservation concerns for these potentially limiting habitat areas. Additionally, local solutions need to have mechanisms to ensure they will in fact be implemented, for example be regulatory in nature to the extent practicable.

The Service encourages the BLM to continue to actively advocate for sage-grouse conservation, and perhaps more importantly, healthy sagebrush ecosystems, going beyond the Wyoming Core Area Strategy guidelines where possible. We understand the proactive conservation efforts that you have undertaken regarding the decision to execute the Wyoming Core Area Strategy. We recognize that the conservation of sage-grouse will involve difficult choices in prioritizing management objectives for a variety of needs within Wyoming. While we do not advocate for elimination or preclusion of any activity, we do encourage the BLM and project proponents to consider all alternatives that minimize or remove impacts to the sagebrush ecosystem. We offer our assistance in these efforts, if desired. Additionally, we encourage the BLM to continue to be active participants in the decision-making processes conducted by land managers in Wyoming, including State agencies, which affect sage-grouse and sagebrush. We recognize the BLM's expertise in sage-grouse and encourage use of that expertise to inform these planning processes.

In summary, the Service believes the Wyoming Core Area Strategy, if fully supported and implemented, could ameliorate many threats to the sage-grouse in Wyoming. We fully recognize and appreciate your commitment and financial obligation to this important conservation effort. This long-term, science-based vision for the conservation of sage-grouse has set the stage for similar conservation efforts across the species' range, a notable feat onto itself.

We look forward to continuing to work with the BLM in Wyoming on sage-grouse conservation. The Service again commends the BLM's leadership for your proactive and insightful efforts and your commitment to the long-term conservation of this species.

If you have any questions regarding the information provided here, please do not hesitate to contact me at 307-772-2374 or Alex Schubert of my staff at extension 238.

cc: BLM, Planning & Environmental Coordinator, Lander, WY (K. Yannone)  
BLM, Natural Resource Specialist, Buffalo, WY (T. Bills)  
BLM, Planning & Environmental Coordinator, Worland (C. Hiner)  
WGFD, Statewide Habitat Protection Coordinator, Cheyenne (M. Flanderka)  
WGFD, Non-Game Coordinator, Lander (B. Oakleaf)



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services  
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In Reply Refer To:  
06E13000/WY12CPA0134

JUN 28 2012

### Memorandum

To: Field Manager, Lander Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, Wyoming

From:  Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wyoming Field Office,  
Cheyenne, Wyoming 

Subject: Lander Resource Management Plan Revision Conformance Review for Greater  
Sage-grouse National Technical Team Report

Thank you for your letter dated June 12, 2012, received in our office June 14, and attached Conformance Table and PowerPoint Presentation as well as an updated Conformance Table provided to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) on June 25. Your documentation requests comments from the Service in Cheyenne, Wyoming regarding the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) consideration of the National Technical Team (NTT) recommended greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*) conservation measures. After our review, it appears that the Lander Resource Management Plan (RMP) preferred alternative, for various reasons, has not adopted all of the conservation measures, in full, as written in the NTT report. The Service sees the conformance review of the Lander RMP to the greater sage-grouse NTT report as a local, BLM function. In this regard, we strongly encourage you to coordinate with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, where appropriate, for development of an appropriate rationale to justify any deviations of the Lander RMP revision from the NTT report.

Additionally, the Service has the following specific comments regarding the BLM's current "Preferred Alternative" of the Lander RMP. The following reference numbers follow the Lander Field Office NTT Conformance Table provided to the Service on June 25, 2012.

Line 31, Conformance Table. The NTT Report states "When conducting land health assessments include indicators and measurements of structure, condition, and composition of vegetation specific to achieving sage-grouse habitat objectives. If local/state seasonal habitat objectives are not available, use sage-grouse habitat recommendations from Connelly *et al.* 2000b and Hagen *et al.* 2007)." However, the corresponding text in the proposed Lander RMP does not specifically mention sage-grouse. The Service recommends the text of the proposed RMP be modified to reference the inclusion of specific sage-grouse habitat objectives in grazing strategies and rangeland management.

Line 32, Conformance Table. The NTT Report states “Monitor measureable objectives and evaluate grazing management to assure that management actions are achieving sage-grouse habitat objectives.” However, the corresponding text in the proposed Lander RMP does not specifically mention monitoring sage-grouse habitat. The Service recommends the text of the proposed RMP be modified to include statements that will commit the BLM to ensure that there is adequate monitoring and range evaluation activities necessary to ensure long-term sage-grouse habitat objectives.

Line 52, Conformance Table. The NTT Report states “Close priority sage-grouse habitat areas to fluid mineral leasing. Upon expiration or termination of existing leases, do not accept expressions of interest for parcels within priority areas.” This management action was evaluated in the Lander RMP as part of the Conservation Alternative; however, it was not selected as part of the proposed plan. Because of the very high value of the sage-grouse priority areas within the Lander resource area to sage-grouse conservation and because this area has relatively little resource development potential, the Service strongly recommends the BLM to adopt this conservation measure from the NTT Report, in full, and incorporate it into the Proposed Plan.

Line 57, Conformance Table. The NTT report states that “if a lease is partially or entirely within priority habitat areas, to the extent possible, and consistent with existing rights, limit disturbance to an average of one site per 640 acres on average, with no more than 3% direct surface disturbance in the analysis area.” A similar management action (2.5% disturbance level) was evaluated in the Lander RMP as part of the Conservation Alternative; however, it was not selected as part of the proposed plan. Instead, a limit of no more than 5% direct surface disturbance was incorporated into the proposed plan. Because of the very high value of the priority habitat areas in the BLM’s Lander resource area to sage-grouse conservation and because this area has relatively little resource development potential, the Service strongly recommends the BLM to adopt this conservation measure at the 3% level from the NTT Report and incorporate it into the Proposed Plan.

Line 58, Conformance Table. The NTT report states that “To limit impacts to breeding and nesting habitat, surface-disturbing and disruptive activities shall be prohibited or restricted within 4 miles of a lek to the extent possible consistent with valid existing rights. If the entire lease is entirely within the 4-mile perimeter of a lek, require any development to be placed at the part of the lease farthest from the lek, or, based depending on topography and other habitat features, in an area demonstrably the least harmful to sage-grouse.” However, the management action was not incorporated into the proposed plan. Because of the very high value of the BLM’s Lander resource area to sage-grouse conservation and because the area has relatively little resource development potential, the Service urges the BLM to further investigate the possibility of adopting conservation measures to protect nesting and brood-rearing habitat within 4 miles of leks within priority habitat areas.

Line 60, Conformance Table. The NTT report states that “unitization should be encouraged when deemed necessary for proper development and operation of an area or to facilitate more orderly development as a means of minimizing adverse impacts to sage-grouse.” This conservation measure was not, however, incorporated into the proposed plan. Even though unitization may not be an RMP decision, and is instead a decision that is made by the Reservoir

Group, the Service recommends adopting this conservation measure from the NTT report so that the RMP will support reducing adverse impacts to sage-grouse that may result if unitization is not encouraged.

Line 63, Conformance Table. The NTT report states that “a full reclamation bond should be required specific to the site and sufficient to cover costs required for full reclamation.”

However, this management action was not incorporated into the RMP because bond amounts are set by other authorities. The Service recommends that this conservation measure be incorporated into the RMP. This conservation measures does not specifically address bond amounts. It only states that bonds need to be sufficient to cover costs of reclamation.

Line 70, Conformance Table. The NTT report states that “new compressor stations will be located outside priority habitats.” However, the proposed plan adds the clause “if technically feasible” to this management action. The Service recommends the BLM adopt the conservation measure from the NTT report as originally written.

Line 97, Conformance Table. The NTT report states “Do not use fire to treat sagebrush in less than 12-inch precipitation zones (e.g., Wyoming big sagebrush or other xeric sagebrush species; Connelly et al. 2000, Hagen *et al.* 2007, Beck *et al.* 2009). However, if as a last resort and after all other treatment opportunities have been explored, and site specific variables allow, the use of prescribed fire that would disrupt fuel continuity or enhance land health could be considered where cheatgrass is a very minor component in the understory (Brown 1982).” The Service recommends that this conservation measure be incorporated into the RMP, as written.

Line 133, Conformance Table. In the proposed plan, the Service recommends the words “if technically feasible”, be removed from the sentence that discusses the placement of liquid gather facilities and compressor stations outside Core Areas.

Regarding the range of alternatives in the current version of the draft Lander RMP revision, the Service favors the “Conservation Alternative” as it offers the most extensive protective measures for the greater sage-grouse. Furthermore, because the area offers superb opportunities to proactively manage some of the last remaining optimal greater sage-grouse habitat but has relatively little resource development potential, the Service urges the BLM to include the Government Draw/Upper Sweetwater sage-grouse Area of Critical Environmental Concern (1,246,791 acres), in its entirety, in the Selected Alternative as part of the Final Lander RMP.

The Service appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Lander RMP Revision Conformance Review for the Greater Sage-grouse National Technical Team Report. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact us at the letterhead address above or phone Alex Schubert of our staff at (307) 772-2374.

cc: BLM, Wildlife Biologist, Lander, WY (S. Oberlie)  
BLM, Planner, Lander, WY (K. Yannone)  
BLM, Natural Resource Specialist, Buffalo, WY (T. Bills)  
BLM, Planning & Environmental Coordinator, Worland (C. Hiner)  
WGFD, Statewide Habitat Protection Coordinator, Cheyenne (M. Flanderka)  
WGFD, Non-Game Coordinator, Lander (B. Oakleaf)